



Inter-agency escalation policy and procedure

Resolution of professional disagreements in work relating to safeguarding children

May 2014

Review Date: May 2016

Reviewing Group: SSCB Policy & Procedures Group

Inter-agency escalation policy:

Resolution of professional disagreements in work relating to the safety of children

1. Introduction

Occasionally situations may arise when workers within one agency feel that the decisions made by a worker from another agency, on a child protection case is not a safe decision.

Disagreements could arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around:

- Level of need / Risk assessment
- Role and responsibilities
- Intervention
- Communication
- Information sharing

Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children. All agencies must work together in the interest of the child and it is recognised that at times there are differences of opinion on how to progress a case

This escalation policy seeks to identify how resolution can be sought where there are differences of opinion.

2. Aim and Objectives

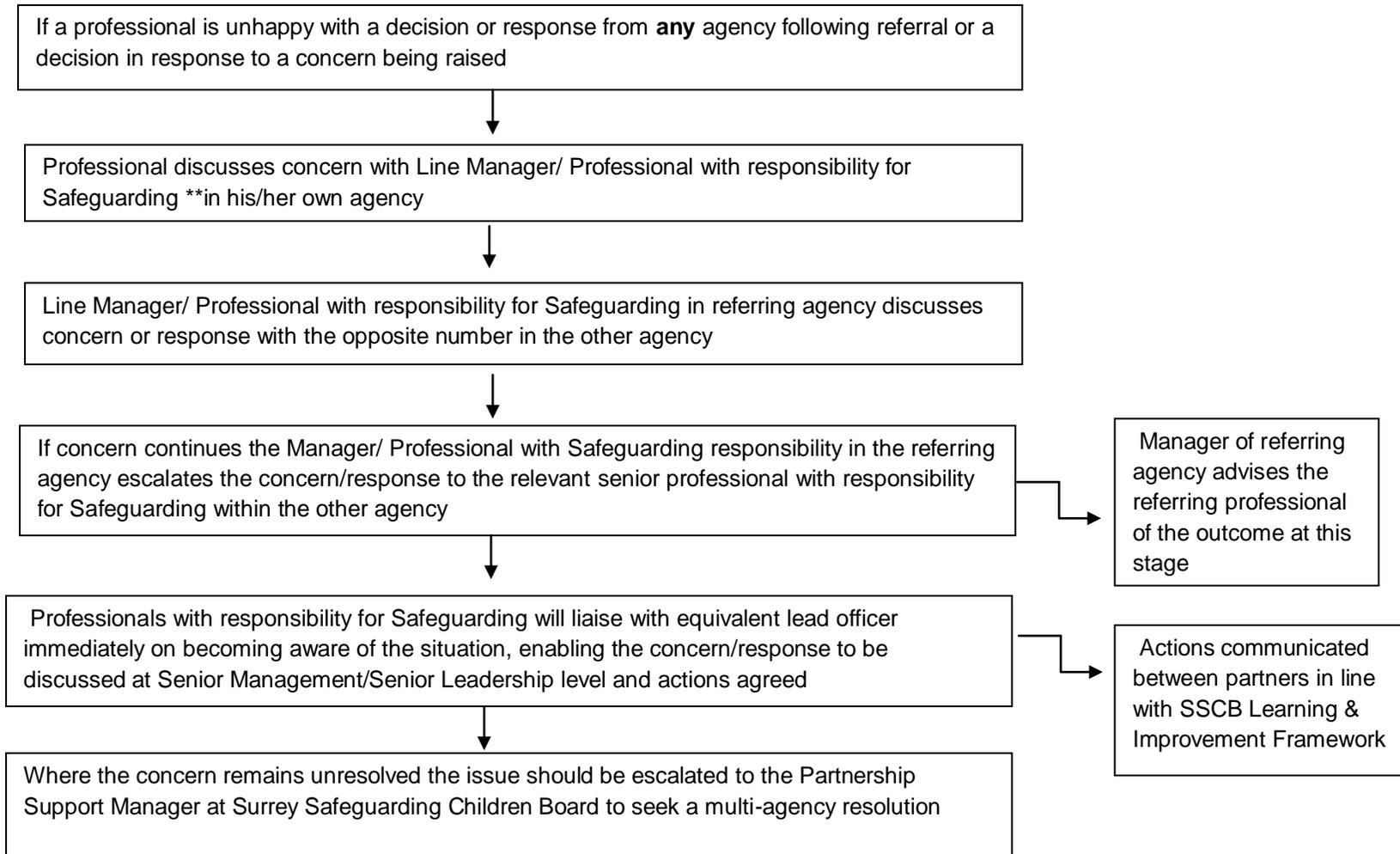
To avoid disputes that:

- detract from the focus on the child
- delay decision making
- resolve difficulties within and between agencies

To identify and anticipate problem areas in working together where there is a lack of clarity and to promote resolution via amendment to protocols and procedures in a timely manner

To ensure that where resolution cannot be found appropriate escalation of concerns ensures that the child is safeguarded

3. Inter-Agency Escalation Procedure for Professionals with Child Protection or Child Welfare Concerns



** The job title and job description of the professional with safeguarding responsibility within an organisation will vary between partner agencies. Individual organisations should ensure that as part of their induction training employees are aware of who to contact to discuss a safeguarding concern or where to seek advice/supervision

At all stages of the Escalation Procedure actions and decisions must be shared in a timely manner with appropriate staff who are directly involved with the service users.

Decisions should be recorded in writing and the referring member of staff should be kept informed of the escalation of their concern. In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued. All records should be retained on the child's case file / agency database.

Effective working together depends upon:

- An open approach and honest relationships between agencies.
- Resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of workers and agencies
- A belief in genuine partnership working.

Professional disputes are reduced by clarity about roles and responsibilities and airing and sharing problems in networking forums.

The principles of effective dispute resolution are:

- The process of resolution should be as simple as possible.
- Resolution should be sought within the shortest timescale possible to ensure the child is protected. Some disagreements regarding safeguarding decisions will require speedy resolution. In all cases where a professional believes a child to be at imminent risk of harm and another agency disagrees they should refer the case to the Surrey Referral Assessment and Information Service who will provide guidance as to whether a referral should be made. Referrals should be made using the Multi Agency referral Form.
- The aim should always be to resolve difficulties at practitioner level between agencies.

It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience of individual staff may affect the confidence of some workers capacity to pursue their concerns if unsupported and internal line management process should be in place to address this and to support the escalation of concerns.

Learning from the resolution of disputes:

When the issue is resolved, any general issues should be identified and referred to the agency's representative on the SSCB for consideration by the appropriate SSCB subgroup to inform future learning and to identify the need for possible changes to existing policies and procedures.

It is useful for individuals to debrief following a dispute in order to promote continuing good working relationships and identify possible training needs and to ensure that the employee is satisfied with the outcome.

Please note that this Procedure does not apply to cases where there may be concerns about the behaviour or conduct of another professional that may impact upon a child's safety and well-being. In such cases, reference should be made to the agency's own Whistleblowing Policy or Professional Standards for Conduct. Specific issues of concern relating to an employee's behaviour or actions towards a child or young person should be referred directly to the Local Authority Designated Officer.

Child Protection Conference Dissents

Where professional dissent occurs at a Child Protection Conference (CP Conference), the Independent CP Conference Chair will make a referral to SSCB Child Protection Dissents (CP Dissents) Group for review. CP Dissents Group is a multi-agency audit group which reviews the conference reports, considers the nature of the dissent and evaluates the decision of the Chair.

The group meets on a monthly basis. The audit enables review of the individual agency's contribution to the CP Meeting and the professional decision making. Feedback and recommendations are made to the Chair and dissenting professional this includes the identification of key issues, themes and if appropriate recommends where changes are required to policies and procedures.

Where a dissent is upheld feedback is provided to the dissenting professional on the next steps and the decision making referred back to Surrey Children's Service to investigate. The report and recommendations from this investigation are reviewed by the Head of Safeguarding and actions identified to hold a further Strategy Meeting.

CP Conference Dissents reports into the SSCB Quality Assurance and Evaluation Sub Group as well as the SSCB Operations Group.